

PROMOTION AND TENURE IN THE DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY

A GUIDE FOR REGULAR TITLE ASSISTANT PROFESSORS*

This document is intended to provide information about the general expectations for promotion to associate professor (regular title series) with tenure in the Department of Communication at the University of Kentucky. It was written with input from tenured and untenured faculty in the Department of Communication and College of Communications and Information Studies, and vetted with the dean of the College and chair of the Social Science Area Committee in fall of 2008 and revised to adjust teacher course evaluation expectations in 2018. The intended audience is assistant professors, area committee members, external evaluators, and University of Kentucky administrators involved in the promotion and tenure process.

Tenure and promotion is of the utmost importance to both the University and the candidate. With very rare exceptions, tenure is a guarantee of lifetime employment to the faculty member. It is a huge monetary investment for the institution—well over \$1.5 million for someone tenured at age 35. Since most institutions commit a significant part of their annual budgets to faculty salaries and benefits, they approach tenure and promotion decisions with the greatest seriousness. It is no exaggeration to say that the quality of a university's faculty is directly tied to the rigor and fairness of its tenure process. The cumulative effect of good tenure decisions is to strengthen institutional performance and reputation. Lowered standards for tenure inevitably lead to mediocrity.

Tenure signifies recognition of scholarly excellence as well as confidence in the integrity of the candidate. The tenure and promotion process works effectively only if it is truly a review by one's peers: faculty reviewing other faculty. It is the most exacting kind of scrutiny.

Committees of tenured faculty review every relevant aspect of a candidate's case and turn in a recommendation on whether to forward it to central administration and the academic area advisory committee. If the recommendation is favorable, the academic unit and the college will act as advocates for the candidate in seeking an ultimately positive outcome. Although letters written by one's departmental colleagues can be influential, those faculty whose opinion carries the greatest weight in the process are the nationally known external evaluators, members of the area advisory committee, and the central administrators—individuals least likely to know the candidate personally. Their job is to enforce this meritocracy without caprice, sentiment, or favoritism. The final decision is vested in those whose interests concern the university as a whole.

To sum up, tenure is not supposed to be easy to get. If it were, it would not be worth much to either the institution or the faculty member. The standards for tenure are neither abstract nor defined with precision. They are continually re-created and reaffirmed in every decision. Specific negative outcomes can sometimes seem frustratingly insensitive (an appeals process is available to those candidates who believe a negative decision was made in error). When the process works well, though, there should be an overall consistency in who gets tenured and who does not. We offer the following guidelines on research, teaching, and service in an attempt to enhance and promote that consistency.

RESEARCH

The University of Kentucky is a research university with very high research activity (Carnegie classification RU/VH). It is one of seven institutions in the nation with its particular constellation of colleges (including those in the medical center). It awards a large number of doctoral and master's degrees in many fields, attracts a sizable amount of external funding, and

operates significant research facilities. Given our institution's profile, the regular title faculty members that are recruited and retained must produce research as well as teach and provide service. While the Administrative Regulations (AR II 1.0-1 V-B) emphasize the importance of "balance of intellectual attainment" across teaching, research, and service (the idea that individuals should be excellent in each respect), it is the ability to conduct high-quality research in nearly every scholarly discipline that truly distinguishes a research university from other institutions of higher education. At research universities the faculty is obligated to create new knowledge, not just disseminate knowledge resulting from the research of others.

What counts for promotions, above all else, is demonstrated scholarly productivity and quality. Do not misunderstand: Teaching and service are very high priorities for the University at all levels. Extending knowledge (research) is seen as complementary to transferring knowledge skills (teaching). A faculty that is active in research is one that defines the very field that it teaches. A research-active faculty should convey the excitement and skills of investigation and critical thinking to students, both undergraduate and graduate. However, to repeat the point just made, a research university is uniquely mandated to perform a comprehensive research function. The importance of that mission becomes translated, at the level of faculty evaluation, into the ability to do competent and original scholarship.

The following criteria are meant to serve as guidelines for making an informed judgment of research productivity and performance. These guidelines reflect the consensus of the Department of Communication regarding the general research expectations of regular title assistant professors' tenure and promotion. The Department recognizes and affirms that the unique characteristics of an individual's research agenda may necessitate a different and equally appropriate pattern of publication. It is incumbent upon the candidate and his/her unit to make a

compelling case for the strength of the research and publication record in all cases, but particularly in those that deviate from the standards outlined in this document. It should be noted that while these guidelines describe the baseline level of accomplishment, the simple attainment of this level of productivity does not guarantee award of tenure or promotion.

Developing a Research Program

A research program is a series of projects centered around a core of research questions. Ideally, these questions ought to be ones that your field recognizes as vital and problematic. This series of projects should result in a series of publications during the probationary period. In a very real sense, your research program is your repertoire of publications. The awareness and appreciation of your work by external evaluators (whose letters constitute an important, sometimes decisive part of the tenure and promotion dossier) will be influenced by your research program, and the impressions of University of Kentucky reviewers who examine your dossier will be heavily influenced by these scholars' testimony to your work's "visibility" (i.e., estimation of its impact) and quality. In this regard, a research program is essential. Unless you have a series of publications that appear to be logically linked in terms of theme and purpose, tenure and promotion examiners might conclude that you either have a weak research program or one that is not focused.

Must you have a single research program? It is certainly time-efficient to have a primary research focus because it is easier to stay current with developments in the scholarly literature, other people's labs, etc. On the other hand, you may want to develop more than one research program. The need to accommodate more than one set of interests (maybe just to stay interested!) often accounts for starting and maintaining parallel lines of work. However, you must be able to articulate how the two lines interrelate to justify them to evaluators.

Quantity of Publications

Standards for attaining tenure at research universities have become more rigorous over the years in terms of both the quantity and quality of publications expected. It is not possible to state these expectations with precision because each candidate's record is unique and the various evaluators change constantly (especially the members of the Area Committee and the outside evaluators). At this writing, however, as a rough guide, for every year counted toward tenure, you should aim for an average of two research publications per year. Thus, a total of about 12 publications, either actually published or in press by the first semester of the sixth year (or seventh or eighth if you have received an automatic tenure clock extension) (when the promotion dossier goes forward), should be an adequate number toward attaining promotion to associate professor with tenure. Quantity is certainly not the sole factor that is considered, however. It is possible to be tenured with fewer than 12 publications; of course, it is also possible that more than 12 will not result in tenure. A variety of other factors, not the least of which is quality of one's research, are extremely important. These factors are reviewed next.

Quality of Publications

Research quality is notoriously difficult to define. Within most scholarly communities, the quality of research contributions is evaluated by such issues as (a) how compelling the questions are that motivated the research (the potential gain to the field), (b) how well the study is designed, (c) how competently the study was conducted, (d) how productively the author is able to link the study's outcomes to practical and/or theoretical concerns, and (e) how well the author has articulated all of the above. Beyond these broad issues, the following factors can influence perceptions of quality:

-- the prestige of the scholarly research journal or other publication venue

- the journal's rejection rate
- the journal's impact factor
- the article's citation impact or H-index
- the type of article [e.g., standard versus "research in brief" versus "book review"]

(which count for little)]

- the recognition of the publication through an award

Overall, there should be evidence of growing competence and value of your research program during the period of probation.

Trajectory

"Trajectory" refers to the growth (or decline) of your research activity during the probationary period. Two typically undesirable trajectories are 1) a fair amount of publication early in one's assistant professor career, followed by a steady or precipitous drop in productivity; 2) a protracted slow start at publishing, then a burst right before the tenure review process begins. The former bodes ill for your continuing value to the department; the latter looks suspiciously like you "geared up" just in time to get tenure. Alternatively, a desirable trajectory is one that shows a steady production of published work, year in, year out. Perhaps the very best trajectory is one that displays a steady, upward rate of production. Consistent production is a visible (therefore, trustworthy) earmark of an accomplished, self-motivated scholar. In effect, nothing needs to be "explained" because the steadiness of scholarly production speaks for itself.

Authorship Credit

Authorship credit is significant in assessing a faculty member's contribution to a publication. It tells an external evaluator which author had primary responsibility for the article, and which had more secondary roles.

The scale of desirability for authorship credit is fairly standard at research universities. Sole authorship is still considered the best circumstance. It signals that you did nearly all of the work and are completely responsible for what appears in print. A very close second (and in some cases one would argue a tie) is first authorship. In today's climate of inter- and transdisciplinary research, especially with funded research, publications by teams of researchers are more and more common. First authorship denotes a lead role for the author in developing the publication, usually (but not always) in the conceptualization or "idea work" that was involved. Not only does your institution count such an article heavily, but it will tend to be associated with the first author in the minds of those who read and cite it. You should strive to have at least 50% of the minimum desired number of publications be sole or first author (i.e., at least six of 12 publications); included would be publications on which you are a second author "equal" to the first author in terms of contribution to the manuscript (see next paragraph).

Second, third, fourth, etc. authorship has less stature than the aforementioned levels—but it is better than no authorship at all. These secondary authorship positions are sometimes interpreted as a rank order and are usually more specialized (e.g., assisting in the literature review, collecting data, analyzing data). Co-authors who wish to signal unambiguously that equal credit should be given, regardless of order of appearance, must make sure that such a statement is printed, usually in the author's note on the first page of the article.

Editor roles follow the same ranking guidelines as author roles. It should be noted that unless there are unusual circumstances, taking on the role of editor of a scholarly book or special journal issue typically should be reserved for those with tenure; many argue that book editing is service.

Publishing Venues

Where you publish is extraordinarily important and directly related to the “quality” issue noted earlier. At promotion and tenure time, reviewers will be cued to the importance of your work by where it is placed. Several factors come into play and interact in determining the quality of your publication outlet: venue type, review category, book type, journal type, and journal rank.

Venue types include scholarly books, journal articles, book chapters, and conference proceedings. Even if you are working with an original line of work, you should avoid writing a scholarly book until tenured, primarily because the period of time between a book idea and actual publication can easily be four to five years, plus at least another two years for the impact on the field to be determined, through, for example, reviews in scholarly journals or citation rates—a time frame that does not fit with the six years of pre-tenure probation. Scholarly books are almost always crafted by mature scholars who need more space to explore areas that often stem from earlier material published in refereed journals. A wiser venue, arguably the “coin of the realm” when it comes to scholarly production, is the journal article. After that come book chapters and, finally, conference proceedings.

These rankings must be qualified, however, by the other factors. Most important is the review category: Is the work refereed, invited, or non-refereed? A refereed (i.e., blind peer-reviewed) manuscript is ranked much more highly than a non-refereed manuscript. So, for example, a refereed book chapter in a competitive publication such as *Communication Yearbook* would “count more” than a non-refereed article in a journal. An invited piece, typically reviewed by an editor, falls somewhere in between; of course, this ranking would be moderated by the prestige of the venue to which you are invited to contribute (e.g., a major handbook). It is

incumbent upon the candidate to stipulate clearly which publications are refereed, especially in cases where evaluators may assume they are not (e.g., book chapters).

In terms of type of book, scholarly books are most highly evaluated, followed by edited scholarly books. Textbooks almost invariably do not count toward promotion and tenure because they do not usually constitute original contributions to our knowledge of communication. (This exclusionary criterion is in fact an essential definition of a textbook. Obviously, many scholarly books that do make original contributions are also adopted for instructional use.)

In terms of type of journal, national or international disciplinary journals are most highly evaluated (e.g., *Journal of Communication*, *Human Communication Research*; see the Department of Communication's list of "Wethington Award" journals (see department chair for the list) for those we have designated as "top tier"). Regional journals follow because, despite their national distribution, their affiliation with regional associations and the fact that most of the members of the editorial boards of these journals are from institutions in those regions reinforce their sub-national status. In addition, most regional journals and the like are not listed in ISI and thus information on impact rating and other such criteria aren't available. Specialty journals serve a more restricted interest, disseminating research and theory relevant to a special interest within the communication field. Although they usually will not have as large a circulation as the disciplinary journals, if they are related to a faculty member's research focus and have good reputations (e.g., *Health Communication*, *Journal of Health Communication*), they can be evaluated as highly as national and international disciplinary journals.

An important question regards whether you should publish in journals "within the discipline" or "outside the discipline." Especially in the context of inter- or transdisciplinary

research, manuscripts you prepare may well be acceptable for journals that are not strictly identified as communication oriented. As long as the majority of your work is published in communication-related venues, publishing in appropriate outlets outside the discipline is appropriate. There might potentially be a problem if most of your work appears in non-communication journals. At the very least, the department chair (and tenured faculty during two- and four-year reviews) should monitor this tendency and offer appropriate counsel; at promotion and tenure time, the chair's letter of support should justify a candidate's heavy reliance on such journals. Of course, you should always try to find the best fit between manuscript and journal, whether or not the journal is in the communication field.

Regardless of the disciplinary orientation, the targeted journal should be of superior standing. This refers to factors introduced under research quality: strong reputation/tier rating/prestige, high rejection rate, strong impact factor. Ultimately, you should strive to have at least 70% of the minimum desired number of publications appear in refereed outlets (i.e., about eight to nine publications), the higher quality the better.

Conference Papers

Conference papers are accorded very little, if any, value for promotion and tenure *in terms of counting toward research productivity*. They can show a steady progression of work, especially in the event of a series of manuscript submissions appearing in print seemingly "all at once" due to review and publication delays. They also indicate a presence in the field, which is important. In particular, "Top" papers especially help with visibility and recognition. Finally, they do have value where annual performance evaluations are concerned. (This is one instance where expectations for merit salary increases and for promotion and tenure may differ.)

Grants and Fellowships

Grant awards are the lifeblood of research universities since they pay “indirect costs” for operating research facilities, supporting teaching assistants and research assistants, etc. They also represent unambiguous and universally-recognized evidence of institutional research prowess. For the faculty member, grants are often the only way to conduct certain kinds of research—especially the kind that is cost-intensive. Still, a basic fact remains: An assistant professor does not have to be successful in getting grants for the purpose of promotion and tenure in the Department of Communication. You simply need to conduct and publish your research following the guidelines provided above. With that said, evidence of some involvement in funded research is likely to strengthen a dossier.

One option is to apply for “internal” or university funding, whether it be a small research grant, a summer fellowship, or some other mechanism. Another option is to serve as co-investigator on a proposed project with a senior faculty mentor. Finally, depending on the experience of the assistant professor, a third option is, indeed, to go for your own grant. The ultimate question here is whether the trade-off—trading time and energy for the probability (whether high or low) of landing a grant—is worth it. Given the high risk nature of the enterprise, pursuing your own extramural funding as an assistant professor should be undertaken only in special circumstances and with the knowledge/support of the chair and tenured faculty.

TEACHING AND ADVISING

Compared to the previous section on research, this one is relatively brief. The brevity implies no denigration of teaching as a part of your professional life, or any diminution of its role in the academic unit. On the contrary, good teaching (superior teaching, if possible) is expected. Teaching weighs rather significantly in your “Distribution of Effort” (DOE), and thus on the merit ratings which are used in calculating most of the salary increase. And on the experiential

level, it is simply more pleasurable to have good classes and effective pedagogical outcomes than not. In addition, pressure for better teaching and advising from faculty has come from both the general public and state legislatures.

The standard teaching load for tenure-track faculty in the Department of Communication is two courses per academic semester. This is quite appropriate for what is expected of you in terms of research productivity. Typically, you will teach undergraduate courses your first year or two in the department. After that, however, it will be important to begin teaching graduate courses (typically one per year).

In addition to teaching classes, you will have advising responsibilities. The number of graduate students you advise is up to you, although it is wise to be relatively selective prior to tenure and promotion. As an untenured assistant professor (and associate member of the graduate faculty), you are eligible to chair master's committees but not doctoral committees (unless there are exceptional circumstances). It is important that you have an adequate amount of graduate student committee service. A good guideline is to chair no more than one master's committee at a time and serve on a total of no more than five to six committees at a time.

Evidence of Effective Teaching

With regard to promotion and tenure, you need to think about the overall corpus of evidence that will be assembled to validate your teaching effectiveness. One form of evidence, of course, is the Teacher Course Evaluations that are administered in your classes each semester. These results (statistical summaries of the objective portion and the open-ended remarks by students) are cited for your annual merit evaluations, peer reviews, and ultimately your promotion and tenure dossier. Typically, there are differences between "overall quality of the teaching" and "overall value of the course" scores (scores for "teaching" are usually higher), and

there will be some variation based on whether a course is required, elective, large lecture, UK core, special topic, or a graduate seminar. With these caveats, and stating explicitly that there is no set score that must be attained, any individual score below a 4 (on the 5-point scale) is worrisome and, across courses, an average of 4.00 or higher is desirable; of course, the higher the better. Much of the rest of the teaching file will be a product of your own initiative, following guidelines set forth for the Teaching Portfolio (AR II-1.0-5), which will be included with your dossier in the promotion and tenure review. Some initiatives you might consider would be to ask senior faculty to review and provide feedback on your course materials, or invite them to visit one or more of your classes and provide feedback on your teaching. The results of these evaluations then could be included in your Teaching Portfolio.

SERVICE

Typically, 5-10 percent of one's DOE is allocated to service, which traditionally is defined as service on academic committees and service to the profession and/or public. In terms of academic committee work, untenured assistant professors usually reserve their service to the level of the department and, as appropriate, college. University-level service typically is not expected of an assistant professor. Service to the profession comprises review work (e.g., journal manuscripts, conference papers), holding of an office in a professional organization (e.g., secretary of a division), and the like. The untenured assistant professor always needs to be mindful of over-committing to service: It will take all the time you can give it and provide relatively little in return in terms of promotion and tenure. A few caveats in regard to professional service: A certain amount is warranted to establish your visibility in the discipline. In addition, service can provide an excellent learning opportunity. For example, you can learn a great deal about publishing when you review manuscripts, having the opportunity to see the

process from the “other side.” Finally, more service is typically expected toward the end of the probationary period.

SUMMARY

Here, we provide a summary of the guidelines related to research, teaching, and service offered above. Remember, these are guidelines only: Meeting or exceeding them is not a guarantee of tenure and promotion, and, depending on the circumstances, falling below them does not necessarily mean you will not be tenured and promoted.

Research: About 12 publications; at least 50% of the minimum desired number of publications as sole or first author; at least 70% of the minimum desired number of publications in peer-reviewed venues; evidence of quality (e.g., top-tier journals).

Teaching: Average teaching evaluations not below 4.00; some graduate instruction; adequate amount of service on graduate student committees.

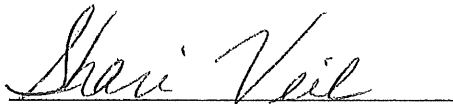
Service: Service on some departmental and possibly college committees; some service to the profession and/or public.

CONCLUSION

It is our experience that the process of gaining promotion to the rank of associate professor with tenure at research universities in the United States is becoming more complicated and challenging. The rules are becoming more stringent and the review process more lengthy and involved. On the other hand, the process has, at some institutions (including ours), become more organized with regard to having the institution, its colleges and academic units provide detailed guidelines on what one is expected to do in the areas of teaching, research, and service to gain permanent employment. This document is our attempt to provide more information

about the guidelines to attain tenure and promotion in the Department of Communication at the University of Kentucky.

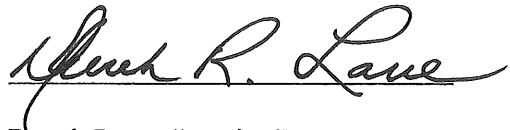
*This "Statement of Evidences" was formally written down and this document adopted in Spring 2009 and revised to adjust teacher course evaluation expectations in fall 2018. However, it represents the same criteria communicated to the candidate at the time of hire and as reiterated throughout the candidate's tenure. The candidate has reaffirmed this.



Shari R. Veil, Professor and Chair

Date

12/5/18



Derek Lane, Interim Dean

Date

12/5/18